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ABSTRACT

A curriculum decisionmaking questionnaire was formulated and administered to 407 school-affiliated persons to determine if the levels of curricular decisionmaking; i.e., societal, institutional, and instructional -- as proposed by John I. Goodlad, are reflective of practice. Analysis of responses indicates that, in the five school systems studied, the societal and instructional level decisions are made by persons at those organizational levels, but that the institutional level decisions are often made by persons at the other two levels or are not handled systematically by any identifiable person or agency. It was also determined that teachers participate extensively, often unilaterally, in making curricular decisions. (Author)

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CURRICULAR DECISION MAKING IN SELECTED SCHOOL SYSTEMS

(Paper presented at the 1973 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans)

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This paper reports an investigation of curricular decision making as it relates to the Goodlad conceptualization of decision making reported in The Development of a Conceptual System for Dealing with Problems of Curriculum and Instruction.[1]

Briefly, the Goodlad system posits curricular decision making as occurring at three levels of remoteness from the learner. The societal level is characterized by decisions which are broadly stated and which affect all learners in the school system and are formulated by Boards of Education, for example. Institutional level decisions are ones which are more specific in terms of intent, in agreement with the societal level decisions, and made by faculty groups, central office persons, subject matter department members and the like. These decisions further delineate the parameters of the schools' activity. Instructional decisions are ones which are specific in language intended for specific learners or groups of learners, not in conflict with institutional level decisions, and made by individual teachers or teams of teachers. (A later section of this paper lists the curricular decisions which fall within these levels.)

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[1]John I. Goodlad and Maurice W. Richter, The Development of a Conceptual System for Dealing with Problems of Curriculum and Instruction, Cooperative Research Project No. 454 (Los Angeles: University of California and Institute for Development of Educational Activities, 1966).

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The study took its principal focus from the statement of belief made by Goodlad that this system of decision making is indicative of practice. The principal research question, then, might be stated as: To what degree does the Goodlad conceptualization actually reflect the location (level of decision making) of basic curricular decisions? (The study does not address the issue of whether the decision locus should be as posited by Goodlad.)

A Curricular Decision Making Questionnaire was formulated for this investigation and administered to 407 school-affiliated persons representing Board of Education members, administrators and supervisors, and teachers in five school districts. The data collection instrument was composed of forty-three discrete curricular decisions which were keyed to the decision-making levels to be tested--societal, institutional, instructional--prior to administration. The respondents were also keyed to the levels according to the position held in the school system. The items included in the questionnaire dealt with the four curricular issues, accepted by Goodlad, included in the rationale of Ralph W. Tyler--purposes, experiences, organization, and evaluation.

Five judges validated the curricular decisions. Three judges validated the placement of the decisions within the Goodlad conceptual system framework.

The final listing of the forty-three decisions categorized according to purposes, experiences, organization, and evaluation, and also identified as to the level of the conceptual system resulted in the following:

Societal Level Decisions

Purposes	1. Selects broad aims for a school system. 2. Selects values to guide the instructional program.

Institutional Level Decisions

Purposes	3.	Selects objectives for a subject matter field.
	4.	Identifies attitudes for learners to attain (general; for all learners in the school system).
	5.	Identifies skills for learners to attain (general; for all learners in the school system).
	6.	Selects procedures for diagnosing learner needs (general; all learners in school system).
	7.	Selects procedure for analysis of diagnosis of learner needs (general; all learners in school system).
	8.	Decides how the diagnosis of learner needs will be used by the school system (general; all learners in school system).
Experiences	9.	Selects technological instructional aids for the school system.
	10.	Recommends purchase of expendable materials for general student use.
	11.	Selects learning theory to guide teacher activity.
	12.	Selects alternative sets of activities for a subject matter field.
	13.	Selects alternative sets of textbooks for a subject matter field.
	14.	Selects alternative films, filmstrips, and recordings for a subject matter field.
	15.	Approves alternate sites for field trips for the school system.
	16.	Selects teaching strategy for a content area.
Organization	17.	Selects sequence of content for a discipline (i.e., mathematics from kindergarten through grade twelve).
	18.	Selects sequence of content for a course.
	19.	Assigns time allotments to a course.
	20.	Selects topics or content for a subject matter field.
Evaluation	21.	Selects procedure to evaluate effectiveness of school system's total program of studies.
	22.	Selects procedure to evaluate learners in a subject matter field.
	23.	Selects procedure to evaluate materials of instruction.
	24.	Selects procedure to evaluate course guides and/or courses of study.
	25.	Selects procedure to inform learners and parents of learner's achievement.

26. Selects evaluation instruments for school system.
27. Selects evaluation instruments for subject matter field.

Instructional Level Decisions

Purposes	28. Selects objectives for a unit.
	29. Selects objectives for a lesson.
Experiences	30. Selects specific student activities for a lesson.
	31. Selects expendable materials for use by specific students.
	32. Selects specific textbooks for a learner or group of learners.
	33. Selects specific films, filmstrips, and recordings for a learner or group of learners.
	34. Selects a site for a field trip for a particular group of learners.
	35. Selects teaching strategy for a lesson.
Organization	36. Selects content for a lesson.
	37. Assigns time allotments to units.
	38. Assigns time allotments to lessons.
	39. Selects topic or content for a unit.
Evaluation	40. Selects procedure to evaluate learners in a unit.
	41. Selects procedure to evaluate learners in a lesson.
	42. Selects evaluation instruments for a unit.
	43. Selects evaluation instruments for a lesson.

The questionnaire was designed to elicit answers to two questions regarding curricular decision making: (1) What is the extent of the respondent's participation in making curricular decisions? and (2) Who is perceived by the respondent as making curricular decisions in his school district?

The analysis of the responses from administration of the Curricular Decision-Making Questionnaire indicate that in the school districts participating in the study: (1) societal level curricular decisions are made (2 of 2) by societal level persons; (2) instructional level curricular decisions are made (16 of 16) by instructional level persons; (3) institutional level curricular decisions are not made (1 of 25) by institutional level persons; (4) thirteen of the twenty-five institutional level curricular

decisions do not appear to be made clearly at any of the three levels; (5) two of the twenty-five institutional level curricular decisions appear to be made at the societal level; (6) nine of the twenty-five institutional level curricular decisions appear to be made at the instructional level; (7) size and organizational complexity appear to affect the degree to which school districts are reflective of the levels of decision making tested by the study; (8) teachers participate extensively in making curricular decisions and, more than any of the other positions studied, appear to make decisions consistently more unilaterally; (9) decisions regarding matters of organization appear to receive the least attention of the four types of decisions considered by the study; and (10) perceptions of decision making appear to be in accord with decision-making behavior as reported by respondents.

A problem, then, arises as to how a descriptive conceptualization can clarify the nature of a decision at the institutional level in such a manner as to logically place it there. In the course of this investigation, six additional dimensions which might assist such placement have come to be considered:

1. Proportion of learners affected by the decision
2. Number of teachers affected by the decision
3. Length of time affected by the decision
4. Amount of institutional material resources affected by the decision
5. Degree of specificity of what learners are to do as a result of the decision
6. Scope of the subject matter content included in the decision

Using these six dimensions one could objectify the placement of a decision at one of the levels, and such placement could then suggest the decision-making roles and responsibilities in the institution most likely to make the decision wisely. The findings of this study indicate that the concept of levels of decision making has merit in describing the curricular enterprise and is worthy of further theoretical and empirical inquiry. Specifically, it is recommended that greater research attention be given to the institutional level of decision making.